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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the development of a scale to identify a child's emotional and behavioral skills, competencies, and characteristics, the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale: A Strength-Based Approach to Assessment (BERS). The BERS is a 52-item scale that identifies strengths in five areas: interpersonal strengths, family involvement, intrapersonal strengths, school functioning, and affective strengths. This paper describes development of norms for children without disabilities as well as for children with emotional or behavioral disorders, results of factor analyses, studies of the scale's concurrent and construct validity, and reliability studies. The paper suggests that the BERS is suitable for five uses: (1) to identify children with limited emotional and behavioral strengths; (2) to target goals for an individual treatment plan or individual educational plan; (3) to identify strengths and weaknesses for treatment; (4) to document progress in a strength area as a consequence of specialized treatment or services; and (5) to measure strengths in research and evaluation projects. (DB)

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The Development of a Scale to Assess the Emotional and Behavioral Strengths of Children

Introduction

Many of the behavior assessment scales currently used in mental health, child welfare, and special education are deficit oriented. While these scales are helpful for identifying children in need, they may not be helpful in developing a child's treatment plan or goals. However, strength-based assessment can be used to identify a child's skills and resources, and therefore be useful in developing his/her treatment plans and goals. Strength-based assessment is defined as the measurement of those emotional and behavioral skills, competencies, and characteristics that create a sense of personal accomplishment, contribute to satisfying relationships with family members, peers, and adults, enhance one's ability to deal with adversity and stress, and promote one's personal, social, and academic development.

The Behavior and Emotion Rating Scale: A Strength-Based Approach to Assessment (BERS; Epstein & Sharma, 1997) was developed to provide professionals with a valid and reliable strength-based assessment instrument. The BERS is a 52-item scale that identifies children's emotional and behavioral strengths in five areas: interpersonal strengths, family involvement, intrapersonal strengths, school functioning, and affective strengths. The scale is designed for parents, teachers, counselors, caregivers, and direct service providers to complete on children with whom they work. Each item is comprised of a statement

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describing a strength a child may demonstrate. The respondent then rates the child on a Likert-type scale in terms of how well the item describes the child (O = *Not at All Like the Child* to 3 = *Very Much Like the Child*). Completion time is approximately 10-15 minutes. The item scores are then summed to determine the child's 5 subtest scores and total strength score. The norms, reliability, and validity of the BERS have been established.

Norms

In the winter and spring, 1996, efforts were made to establish norms for the BERS. Several hundred teachers, counselors, and clinicians nationwide were asked to complete the BERS for children with whom they work. Ratings were received on a national sample of 2,100 children without disabilities and 800 children with emotional and behavioral disorders. The sample selection procedures resulted in a normative sample that was representative of the nation as a whole. Based on these data, age and gender norms for children without disabilities (5-18 years of age) were established, as well as norms for children with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Factor structure

Factor analytic procedures were conducted to determine the dimensions of emotional and behavioral strength measured by the BERS. First, using the data set from the 2,100 children without disabilities who had completed BERS, oblique factor analyses with factors set at 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 were conducted. A review of these analyses indicated several low loading items, factors with four or fewer items, and a few non-meaningful, difficult to interpret factors. Then, a second set of factor analyses was run with eigenvalues set at 1.2, item loadings set at .40, and five items set as the minimum number of items in any factor. Based on these criteria five meaningful factors were identified. Then, several items were removed because they were redundant, overlapped with other items, or did not contribute to the factor. Fifty-two items remained following this review. A final factor analysis was conducted with these items and led to the identification of 5 factors: interpersonal strengths, family involvement, intrapersonal strengths, school functioning, and affective strengths. The factors and item loadings are presented in Table 1.

Validity

In spring and summer, 1996, three studies were conducted to assess the concurrent validity of the BERS. For each study, teachers completed the BERS and either *The Teacher Report Form* (Achenbach, 1991), a measure of emotional and behavioral problems (N=84), the *Self-Perception Profile for Children* (Harter, 1985), a measure examining children's global self-esteem (N=78), or the *Walker-McConnell Scale of Social Competence and School Adjustment* (Walker & McConnell, 1988), a measure of social skills and social competence (N=71). Correlational analyses indicated a moderate to high relationship between the BERS and three other measures. Construct validity was determined by comparing the mean standard scores of the two groups used to norm the BERS. Overall, children with emotional and behavioral disorders scored one standard deviation lower than the children without disabilities. Results of the T-test indicated that these differences were statistically significant.

Reliability

In spring and summer, 1996, two reliability studies were conducted to assess the inter-rater reliability and the test-retest reliability of the BERS. In the inter-rater reliability study, teachers and aides/student teachers were asked to complete the BERS on their students. Data from 9 pairs of raters on 96 students with emotional and behavioral disorders were collected. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated on the two groups of raters on the five subscores and total strength scores on the BERS. Correlations were between .83 and .98.

Table 1
Factors and Loadings of the Items of the BERS (Decimals Omitted)

Dimension									
Interpersonal Strength		Family Involvement		Intrapersonal Strength		School Functioning		Affective Strength	
Item	Load	Item	Load	Item	Load	Item	Load	Item	Load
1. Accepts criticism.	76	11. Communicates with parents about behavior at home.	69	19. Demonstrates a sense of humor.	58	10. Attends school regularly.	50	3. Accepts a hug.	74
2. Accepts "no" for an answer.	78	15. Complies with rules at home.	70	20. Demonstrates age- appropriate hygiene skills.	53	12. Completes school tasks on time.	86	5. Accepts the closeness and intimacy of others.	78
4. Accepts responsibility for own actions.	83	18. Demonstrates a sense of belonging to family.	79	22. Enjoys a hobby.	58	13. Completes homework regularly.	82	6. Acknowledges painful feelings.	64
7. Admits mistakes.	80	28. Interacts positively with parents.	86	23. Enthusiastic about life.	74	14. Completes a task on first request.	81	9. Asks for help.	57
8. Apologizes to others when wrong.	78	29. Interacts positively with siblings.	69	26. Identifies own feelings.	70	16. Computes math problems at or above grade level.	62	21. Discusses problems with others.	60
17. Considers consequences of own behavior.	84	35. Maintains positive family relationships.	86	27. Identifies personal strengths.	80	39. Pays attention in class.	76	25. Expresses affection for others.	79
24. Expresses remorse for behavior that hurts or upsets others.	79	36. Participates in family activities.	82	30. Is self-confident.	78	41. Reads at or above grade level.	57	45. Shows concern for the feelings of others.	66
31. Is kind toward others.	81	37. Participates in community activities.	66	32. Is popular with peers.	68	47. Studies for tests.	79		
33. Listens to others.	80	38. Participates in church activities.	58	42. Requests support from peers and friends.	62	52. Uses note taking and listening skills in school.	76		
34. Loses a game gracefully.	75	49. Trusts a significant person with his/her life.	71	46. Smiles often.	57				
40. Reacts to disappointment in a calm manner.	78			48. Talks about the positive aspects of life.	72				
43. Respects the rights of others.	86								
44. Shares with others.	74								
50. Uses anger management skills.	71								
51. Uses appropriate language	83								

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Table 2
Correlation Coefficients Between the BERS and the Walker-McConnell

	Self Control	Peer Relations	School Adjustment	Empathy	Other	Total Score
Interpersonal Strength	.80	.51	.72	.72	.55	.78
Family Involvement	.38	.37	.39	.35	.29	.36
Intrapersonal Strength	.52	.72	.50	.55	.67	.65
School Functioning	.57	.42	.85	.45	.49	.61
Affective Strength	.50	.58	.49	.74	.53	.68
Total	.70	.68	.74	.73	.66	.77

Table 3
Correlation Coefficients Between the BERS and the Self-Perception Profile for Children

	Scholastic Competence	Behavioral Conduct
Interpersonal Strength	.32	.65
Family Involvement	.55	.58
Intrapersonal Strength	.48	.55
School Functioning	.72	.56
Affective Strength	.28	.50
Total	.57	.61

Table 4
Correlation Coefficients Between the BERS and the Achenbach

	Internalizing	Externalizing	Total Score
Interpersonal Strength	NS	-.72	-.60
Family Involvement	NS	-.39	-.42
Intrapersonal Strength	-.39	NS	-.27
School Functioning	NS	-.47	-.51
Affective Strength	NS	-.39	-.33
Composite	NS	-.72	-.61

In the test-retest reliability, 59 students with serious emotional disturbance were rated twice by their teachers over a two-week interval. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated on the two groups of ratings on the five subscores and total strength score on the BERS. Correlations ranged between .85 to .99.

Uses

The BERS has five principal uses: to identify children with limited emotional and behavioral strengths; to target goals for an individual treatment plan or individual educational plan; to identify strengths and weaknesses for treatment; to document progress in a strength area as a consequence of specialized treatment or services; and to measure strengths in research and evaluation projects.

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